

Make Some Noise!

By Mendel Kalmenson

A fascinating study recently revealed the impact of 50 mega celebrities on various charities.¹

\$37,625,503 is a lot of money. That's the amount raised by just ten of those celebrities in the past year, and, amazingly, without them even dipping into their own bank accounts.

They simply attached their names to worthy causes, and the money poured in.

There is even a website that tracks the amounts and beneficiaries of celebrity donations. Their homepage states that they track "1,424 charities, 1,978 celebrities and counting..."

How do we reconcile this idea with the Jewish value of modesty?

That's a lot of star power!

But the point here is not to highlight the impact of celebrities, but the importance of publicizing good deeds.

In answer to a philanthropist who wished to give charity anonymously, so as not to be motivated by desire for honor and recognition, the Rebbe suggested a different perspective: "If a building is dedicated in your name, and your name on its wall is visible to all who walk by, others will also want to give. More people will thus benefit."

On a different occasion the Rebbe told a community activist, "It would be good for you to study Torah regularly, even if only a few minutes every day. And if you do this without keeping it a secret, you would be a shining example for others!"

By now you may be wondering, how do we reconcile this idea with the Jewish value of modesty? The prophet says, "Walk modestly with G-d."² Isn't that an affirmation that Judaism promotes doing goodness quietly, for its own sake rather than ours?

Maimonides actually spells it out clearly: "The highest form of charity is that the giver doesn't know to whom he gave and the recipient from whom he received."³

Not that I'd know, but wouldn't having one's face plastered on an advertisement for charity make it difficult, or impossible, to feel altruistic?

Besides, isn't being recognized for one's giving more selfish than selfless, which seems to defeat the purpose of giving?

Bell Bottoms

There is reason to believe that the high priest was the first ever to wear bell bottoms.

Regarding the *me'il*, a type of cloak that the high priest wore, the Torah instructs, "You shall make on its hem pomegranates of turquoise and scarlet wool, and golden bells among them... Its sound shall be heard when he enters the Sanctuary before G-d, and when he leaves..."⁴

But isn't "making noise" more fitting for fans in a sports stadium than worshippers in a sanctuary? We're talking about the holiest human being in the holiest of places involved in the holiest of services!⁵

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High Heels

According to the Rebbe's assessment, the Talmudic appellation "generation of heels,"⁶ the generation that immediately precedes the Redemption, refers to our generation—for we stand at the heels of the Messianic Era.

Each generation has its particular mission, and is given the necessary tools to implement its task. For example, Moses' generation was dubbed "the generation of knowledge."⁷ They were the "mind" of our people, as a brain is to the human being. And as the brain is the most sensitive organ in the human body, so too was the generation of Moses most spiritually sensitive of the whole of our historic and collective Jewish body. No other generation would ever be privy to the G-dly revelations they witnessed.

G-dly revelation lessened thereafter. Men of G-d became scarcer and open miracles even sparser, until they all but ceased.

Currently, the collective Jewish body is nearing completion. Our generation is the heel, the last organ.

Can our spiritually insensitive generation compare with the spiritual giants of old?

No. A callous heel is not in the same league with a sensitive mind and heart. We are at the bottom for a reason.

We are like the noisy bells at the very bottom of the high priest's coat.

Conversely, however, all the knowledge and fervor of previous generations combined wasn't able to achieve the end goal. It takes a hardened heel, not a fine tuned brain, to cross the finish line.

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It is we who march on undeterred by the unprecedented thorns and thistles of sacrilegiousness that define our day.

And it is we, the "bell bottoms," who maybe treat sanctuaries like stadiums, who use noise when approaching G-d.

In ancient days, when individual refinement was the primary objective, keeping silent about one's spiritual achievement was a virtue. Today, however, when our principal mission is to refine and mend the wider world, keeping silent about one's good deeds is a crime.

I shudder to think about what would happen if good deeds ceased to be publicized—in the "noble" pursuit of personal spiritual refinement. In the name of modesty.

And in the final analysis, would such behavior be selfish or selfless?

What's in It for Me?

Ours is an age that could be coined the "Noise Age." The integration of the public and private domain is nearly complete. Privacy is no longer respected.

Perhaps this is because our generation's mission is more collective than individual.

It's time to substitute, or at least balance, the promotion of narcissism, cynicism, and corruption with the advertisement of goodness, meaning and brotherhood.

If immorality can be publicly flaunted, why can't religiosity be made public? Is it fair that only dirty laundry is aired, while the clean laundry is kept folded away?

Publicizing our positive activities is more like beeping, than tooting, our horns. It's not about advancing ourselves; it's about getting others to move in the right direction.⁸

May we speedily merit hearing the tooting of a different horn: "And on that day [of Moshiach's coming] a big *shofar* will blow."⁹

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FOOTNOTES

1. From *The Celebrity Impact Rankings*, published on thedailybeast.com.
2. [Micah 6:8](#).
3. Laws of Giving to the Poor 10:8.
4. [Exodus 28:33](#); 35.
5. Nachmanides explains the bells as basic protocol. Just as you wouldn't walk in on your neighbor unannounced, the high priest wouldn't walk in on G-d without warning. The bells, like doorbells, announced the arrival of the high priest; after which he'd begin his service. Symbolically, however, there's more to the bells than that.
6. See the end of tractate Sotah for a discussion about the identifying signs of this generation.

7. In reality, this quality ended up impeding their spiritual advance on many occasions, because the mind, with all its calculations, can be very limiting at times.
8. Based on the teachings of the Rebbe, Likutei Sichot vol.16 pg. 341.
9. Isaiah 27:13.

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